Strengthening Military Families: Opportunities for Commanders

BACKGROUND

Need for Change

- Across the Department of Defense (DoD), approximately 70% of incidents that meet criteria for child abuse or neglect are for child neglect.*
- While the overall DoD rate per thousand for child abuse and neglect among military families is 50% of the civilian rate, the DoD percentage of child neglect (relative to other types of child abuse) has remained relatively static despite ongoing prevention efforts.*
- [insert Service or installation data]

*Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy

“The Four Ds” of Child Neglect

- Child neglect in the military is often related to inadequate supervision and exposure to hazards.
- Common stressors contributing to inadequate supervision and exposure to hazards include:
  - Depletion of internal and external resources
  - Disconnection from sources of support
  - Depression and other mental health issues
  - Deployment and other military-related separations
- The protective factors serve as a buffer and can help reduce these kinds of stress and ultimately reduce child neglect.

DoD Policy Response

- DoD Instruction 6400.05, “New Parent Support Program,” was updated June 13, 2012.
- Policy changes promote the research-based protective factors framework developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy and adapted by the Administration for Children and Families under the United States Department of Health and Human Services to prevent child abuse and neglect.
- The protective factors framework has been widely adopted across the public and private sectors.

Why Protective Factors?

- An approach, not a program
  - No new funding required
- Strategically targeted
- Strengths-based
  - Attributes most parents want to strengthen
  - Builds on what's working
- Provides a common language

What Are the Protective Factors?

1. Nurturing and attachment
2. Knowledge of parenting and child development
3. Social connections
4. Parental resilience
5. Concrete support in times of need
6. Social and emotional competence of children

The Protective Factors Framework

- Benefits ALL families
- Builds on family strengths, buffers risk, and promotes better outcomes
- Can be implemented through small but significant changes in everyday actions
- Builds on and can become a part of existing programs, strategies, systems, and community opportunities
- Is grounded in research, practice, and implementation knowledge

From the Center for the Study of Social Policy

New Parent Support Program Response

- [insert any planned changes to Service implementing guidance that will reflect the protective factors framework]
- Home visitors' interactions with parents help to build protective factors.
- The New Parent Support Program (NPSP) is an advocate for the framework within the military community, encouraging cross-program and command promotion of the protective factors.

Why Command?

- Commanders interact daily with military parents and can positively impact their parenting practices and willingness to access support.
- Families who demonstrate the protective factors are better prepared to withstand the stresses associated with military life.
  - Individual and family readiness equates to mission readiness.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMANDERS TO HELP PARENTS BUILD PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Nurturing and Attachment

- **Loving and responsive interactions** between parents and children that help children feel safe, loved, and confident as they explore the world

- Command strategies
  - Universally promote NPSP among [Soldiers/Sailors/Airmen/ Marines] with children age 0-[insert age limit per Service policy]
  - Promote Baby/Daddy Boot Camp [as applicable to Service]
  - Track expecting/new parents and offer individual encouragement (e.g., asking about children and acknowledging the importance of family time)

Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

- Part-natural,

  part-learned **understanding of children's ages and stages**

- Command strategies
  - Universally promote NPSP among [Soldiers/Sailors/Airmen/ Marines] with children age 0-[insert age limit per Service policy]
  - Refer parents to Military OneSource for educational materials and non-medical counseling
    - www.militaryonesource.mil
  - Refer parents to Child and Youth Behavioral Military and Family Life Counselors (CYB-MFLC) [as applicable to Service]
    - [insert local contact information]
  - Encourage parents to use child development and youth program staff as a resource

Social Connections

- **Supportive family, friends, and neighbors** who reinforce positive parenting practices

- Command strategies
  - Universally promote NPSP among [Soldiers/Sailors/Airmen/ Marines] with children age 0-[insert age limit per Service policy]
  - Encourage participation in family readiness groups
  - Encourage connection via unit social media channels
  - Host family events for unit
  - Emphasize the important role of unit sponsors in acclimating new families to an installation/ community/unit

Parental Resilience

- **Strengths**, **skills,** and **resources** that help parents deal with stress and "**bounce back**"

- Command strategies
  - Model concrete skills (e.g., communication and problem solving) and mentor parents with young children
  - Acknowledge the challenging role of parents and offer encouragement
  - Encourage families to access [insert Service-unique name for family programs] and model use of/share experience with such programs

Concrete Support in Times of Need

- Parents know how to find help to meet **basic needs** (e.g., child care and transportation)

- Command strategies
  - Universally promote [insert Service-unique name for family programs] and model use of/share experience with such programs
  - Use command-level forums to discuss installation/community needs of parents and identify solutions

Social and Emotional Competence of Children

- Children know they are loved, feel they belong, and are able to **get along with others**

- Command strategies
  - Highlight the positive impact of child development and youth programs on the social and emotional competence of children
  - Refer parents to Military OneSource for educational materials and non-medical counseling
    - www.militaryonesource.mil
  - Refer parents to CYB-MFLCs [as applicable to Service]
    - [insert local contact information]
  - Recognize that parents of children with social or emotional special needs may face unique challenges; refer to the Exceptional Family Member Program, as appropriate

Where to Implement Strategies

- One-on-one interactions
- Unit newsletter or blog
- Briefings at community events (e.g., Military Family Month celebrations)
- Unit events/meetings
- Unit/installation social media channels (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)
- Family readiness groups

New Parent Support Program Key Messages
(from commanders to parents)

- Under the best circumstances, parenting is difficult.
- Every parent needs support.
- The health and well-being of your family is important to me.
- The NPSP can help you adapt to the life-changing experience of becoming a parent.
- Find out more at [insert telephone number or website address of local NPSP].

Insert Local Service POC Contact Information